

**MARYLAND HISTORICAL TRUST
DETERMINATION OF ELIGIBILITY FORM**

NR Eligible: yes ☒
no ☐

Property Name: James Keelty Daylight Rowhouse Historic District AT GWYNNS FALLS Inventory Number: B-1378

Address: West Baltimore, Gwynns Falls Valley City: Baltimore Zip Code: _____

County: Baltimore City USGS Topographic Map: Baltimore West

Owner: Baltimore City Is the property being evaluated a district? ☐ yes

Tax Parcel Number: _____ Tax Map Number: _____ Tax Account ID Number: _____
City of Baltimore, Department of Public Works - Bureau of Transportation

Project: Edmondson Avenue Bridge Replacement/Rehabilitation Agency: _____

Site visit by MHT Staff: ☐ no ☒ X yes Name: Andrew Lewis Date: 01/21/2004

Is the property located within a historic district? ☒ X yes ☐ no

If the property is within a district

District Inventory Number: _____
James Keelty Daylight Rowhouse Historic

NR-listed district ☐ yes Eligible district ☒ X Yes District Name: District

Preparer's Recommendation: Contributing resource ☐ yes ☐ no Non-contributing but eligible in another context ☐

If the property is not within a district (or the property is a district)

Preparer's Recommendation: Eligible ☒ X yes ☐ no

Criteria: ☒ X A ☒ X B ☒ X C ☐ D Considerations: ☐ A ☐ B ☐ C ☐ D ☐ E ☐ F ☐ G ☒ X None

Documentation on the property/district is presented in: Rehabilitation and/or Replacement of the Edmondson Avenue Bridge - Cultural Resources Assessment

Description of Property and Eligibility Determination: *(Use continuation sheet if necessary and attach map and photo)*

Description

The majority of rowhouses built between 1920 and 1930 flanking both sides of Gwynns Falls Park were built by developer James Keelty. Keelty was one of four major developers who dominated rowhouse construction in Baltimore during the 1920s, the other men being Frank Novak, Ephraim Macht, and Edward Gallagher. Most of these homes boasted suburban living with easy commutes by streetcar or automobile to downtown Baltimore. The homes had the latest appliances and were well built while being affordable to many. These developers generally made their money through ground rents. The building environment changed drastically during the Great Depression, and the market for their rows virtually disappeared. Keelty was one of the few who continued to construct rows during the depression, but in a fundamental change, Keelty, as other builders who continued their projects in the 1930s, began to rent many of the houses they constructed. Styles also changed radically in the 1930s, creating a distinctly different feel to the later neighborhoods. The James Keelty Daylight Rowhouse Historic District is comprised primarily of what was known as

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Eligibility recommended ☒ X Eligibility not recommended ☐
Criteria: ☒ X A ☐ B ☒ X C ☐ D Considerations: ☐ A ☐ B ☐ C ☐ D ☐ E ☐ F ☐ G ☐ None

Comments: _____

Andrew Lewis
Reviewer, Office of Preservation Services
[Signature]
Reviewer, NR Program

4/28/04
Date
4/28/04
Date

200400947

MARYLAND HISTORICAL TRUST
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Continuation Sheet No. 1

Daylight style rowhouses, which were first constructed around 1915, and continued to be erected throughout the 1920s. Early styles were often modest Italianate, which gave way to more experimentation with Tudor and English styles during the late 1920s. In the 1930s, styles again shifted to a more Neo-Classical and Colonial styling. Some of the early 1930s, Keelty houses are included in this district due to their continuity of style and geographic location, including those constructed three blocks north of Edmondson Avenue during the 1930s as far west as Lyndhurst.

The development areas included in this Determination of Eligibility include all Keelty-built rowhouses constructed during the initial development phases of the Gwynns Falls area around Edmondson Avenue between roughly 1920 and 1930. Although some of this area is outside of the Area of Potential Effects for the Rehabilitation and/or Replacement of the Edmondson Avenue Bridge project. The boundaries chosen represent an important geographical, historical, and stylistic distinction in rowhouse development in this area.

Generally, the integrity of the rowhouses is good, some have been vinyl sided, and others have been boarded up, but the trend is toward better maintenance in the past 10 years. On a little less than half of these houses, the original windows have been replaced with double-insulated vinyl clad sashes, usually 1/1 double-hung in the style of the originals. Many garages still exist and in fair condition. Some have been demolished, but relatively few.

Boundaries

The district encompasses a number of neighborhoods including parts of Edmondson, which boundaries extend from the intersection of the Western Maryland Railway and Edmondson Avenue west to Lyndhurst Street and north to Gelston. Houses beyond these western and northern boundaries date past the 1930s and mark a stylistic change to the Tudor and "English Style" rows of the 1930s.

South of Edmondson Avenue but west of Gwynns Falls is Allendale. The boundaries of Keelty's rows within Allendale are roughly Hilton, Mulberry, Normandy, and Edmondson Avenue. Rows along 3300 and 3400 Edmondson and 300 and 400 Hilton were constructed in the 1910s, and 500 Denison and Edgewood were constructed in the 1920s.

East of Gwynns Falls, what is now known as part of Greater Rosemont (including the historic neighborhoods of Winchester, Rosemont, and Franklinton Road), the Keelty rowhouses in this area run eastward of Gwynns Falls, along Edmondson Avenue to Poplar Grove Street and continues west of Poplar Grove Street north of Lafayette Avenue until its intersection with Braddish Avenue. Its northern terminus is Ellicott Drive. Houses along Belmont, Normount, and Elmont are out of the boundaries as they were constructed by the Welsh Construction Company in 1929. Rows built in the historic neighborhood of Mosher, east of Poplar Grove and south of Lafayette to Edmondson Avenue are also not included in this district as they were primarily constructed by George Schoenhals and H.M. Nichols before 1930. Houses along Poplar Grove, Riggs, and Mosher were constructed by James Keelty just before 1930. The areas beyond Braddish and northern Ellicott Driveway were constructed later, in much more contemporary Neo-Classical and Colonial styles.

For a further description of boundaries, see attached USGS map.

Historic Context

In the late-nineteenth century and early-twentieth century, rowhouse suburbanization began to reach out to the edges of Baltimore City. Developers of these rowhouses were usually tradesmen who ventured out, constructing a few houses on speculation and then expanding as their houses sold. One such developer was James Keelty. In 1904, James Keelty, a stonemason and immigrant from Ireland, constructed some homes on speculation, first on Calvert Street then on 25th Street and Greenmount Avenue at the old Oriole Park. From there the young builder began homes on West Baltimore Street and in the Poplar Grove area off Edmondson Avenue. This move to the suburbs was made possible by the expansion of public utilities including transportation by streetcar and water and sewer service. The rowhouses provided city workers with an alternative in living that combined the suburban ideal with the benefits of city living.

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Continuation Sheet No. 2

Early style rowhouses were built in a conventional, two-story design that had one or two "blind" rooms in the center. Many of these were constructed in the Italianate Style. Keelty was a pioneer in the development of the new "daylight" design which had popular appeal because it boasted a window in every room. The daylight design meant a spacious, pleasant housing interior at a modest cost that made home ownership possible for middle-income people. In advertisements for his houses, he proudly referred to himself as "James Keelty, The Builder".

The Edmondson area had become the city's new border in 1888. It sloped, downward to its eastern terminus, the Gwynns Falls, which was the site of earlier mill enterprises. The river cut a deep natural border separating the western, rural area distinctly from the developing urban areas to its east and from the city center three and a half miles away. Prior to 1910 Edmondson Avenue crossed the Gwynns Falls on a narrow trestle bridge constructed by Baltimore County in 1880. The extension of a trolley line in 1899, opening of the new Gwynns Falls span, and extension of city water and sewage systems, prompted construction before and after World War I. James Keelty acquired property along Edmondson by 1922, and the Gelston and Johnson property in 1926 and 1928. Advertisements highlighted the green space features of Keelty built homes. Houses sat on a hilltop and overlooked the scenic Falls. A fifteen-foot green park strip distinguished Wildwood, where houses were built wider and deeper, twenty-two by thirty-seven feet. Half-attics there added extra room, and garages defined homes as modern. Fireplaces, tile porches, and exterior variety within rows distinguished the homes from typical Keelty-built rows.

At this time, the Edmondson area still consisted primarily of farmland and woods. The Ellicott City streetcar line had begun electric service along East Edmondson Avenue in 1899 and a new bridge was constructed across Gwynns Falls in 1907, and by 1914, rowhouses had begun to line Edmondson Avenue east of Gwynns Falls.

Keelty's first projects included completing houses along Calvert Street and Greenmount Avenue in the central portions of the city, in 1908 he turned to the western side, constructing two-story, buff-brick concave front rows in the 2300 blocks of West Fayette and West Baltimore streets. He moved farther out to the growing Poplar Grove area along Mosher and Dukeland Streets and Riggs Avenue in the 1910s. Many of his houses had stone porch fronts and upper bays. Having purchased the land along Edmondson Avenue on the next hill to the west, Keelty began to develop it in the early 1920s. Keelty began constructing rowhouses east of Gwynns Falls during the mid-1920s. In the later 1920s, he constructed houses west of Hilton Street and north of Edmondson Avenue. By 1930 Keelty houses occupied approximately fifty square blocks of the Edmondson area; ten years later most of the section's 1,584 housing units had been constructed by his company.

Keelty houses of the 1920s and 1930s represented the apex of Baltimore rowhouse design, the "daylight" or "sunlight" house. Soon daylight houses were all the rage. Keelty's rowhouses of the early to mid-1920s were well-built, solid and spacious daylight type rows. His building styles of the 1920s and the 1930s in Wildwood, the name he gave developments on the extensive land tracts that had been the Gelston and Lyndhurst estates, were fundamentally different, designed as an upgraded form of the basic daylight box and called English type rowhouses. They were distinguished from the earlier homes primarily by slightly more spacious dimensions (some were twenty-two by thirty-seven feet, with an additional half-story in a gabled attic), slate roofs, copper spouting, tile porches, and fireplaces, and architectural variation in roofing styles, Tudor-type brickwork, and architectural variety within a row. Many of Keelty's rowhouses during this period included detached garages within the alleys. These could be purchased or rented by the minority of residents who had automobiles. Garages were detached due to fear of having explosive gasoline near the dwellings.

Keelty's houses were well built, and "Keelty-built" homes became a hallmark of quality construction. He maintained interest in the community with almost a paternalistic interest in the new neighborhood he had built. He contributed the cost of the sanctuary for the new St. Bernardine's Roman Catholic Church on Edmondson Avenue and Mt. Holly Street as a memorial to his recently deceased young daughter. One early resident recalled that Mr. Keelty rode up Harlem Avenue in a horse drawn buggy four and five years after the houses had been sold and would asked residents if everything was okay with their house.

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Continuation Sheet No. 3

Northern sections of Edmondson (west of Gwynns Falls) were finished with plainer rows in the 1940s and 1950s after James Keelty's death, by his sons.

Evaluation

The James Keelty Daylight Rowhouse Historic District is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A, for its associations with broad patterns of history, mainly the rowhouse development of West Baltimore in the early-twentieth century, and under Criterion B, for their association with one of Baltimore's most prominent builder and businessmen, James Keelty, whose company thrives to this day, and under Criterion C, for its architecture, the daylight type rowhouse of the 1920s promoted by Keelty and then others, which was a unique response to economic, demographic, and social pressures of the period.

Sources:

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2001 *The Baltimore Rowhouse*. Princeton Architectural Press, New York.

Orser, Edward W.

1994 *Blockbusting in Baltimore: The Edmondson Village Story*. The University of Kentucky Press.

Ryon, Roderick N.

1900 *West Baltimore Neighborhood, Sketches of Their History: 1840-1960*. Institute for Publications Design at the University of Baltimore.

Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps

1910-1950 Available at the Enoch Pratt Free Library, Main Branch, Maryland Department.

<http://www.keelty.com/ourcomp.htm>

<http://www.ci.baltimore.md.us/neighborhoods/southwest/edmondson.html>

<http://www.baltimorecity.gov/neighborhoods/southwest/allendale.html>

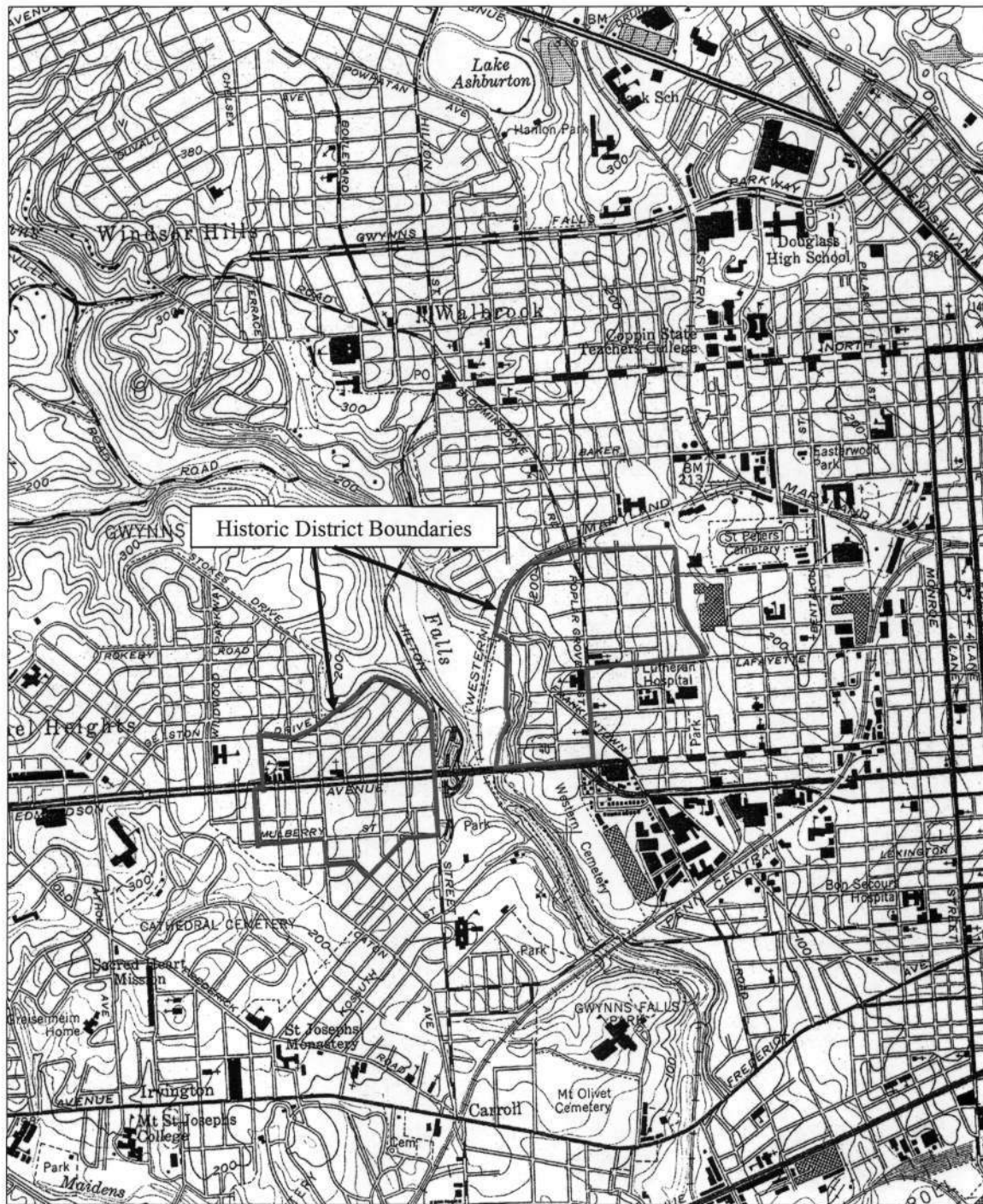
Prepared by:

David C. Berg

Date Prepared: February 12, 2004

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Keilty Daylight Row House Historic District at Gwynns Falls
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Source: USGS Baltimore West Quad.

Map Showing Keilty Daylight Row House Historic District at Gwynns Falls Boundaries

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Continuation Sheet No. 6

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EXAMPLE OF ROWHOUSES NORTH OF GELSTON DRIVE
(OUTSIDE OF HISTORIC DISTRICT) SHOWING STYLISTIC
DIFFERENCES OUTSIDE OF STUDY AREA, LOOKING
NORTH.



MHP No. B-1378

James Keelty Daylight Rowhouse Historic District

Baltimore City, MD

David C. Berg

January 2004

MD SHPO

Rowhouses along Edmondson Avenue between Rosedale and Longwood Streets,
Looking Northeast

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James Keelty Daylight Rowhouse Historic District

Baltimore City, MD

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Rowhouses along Edmondson Avenue between Rosedale and Longwood Streets,
looking Northwest

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Baltimore City, MD

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Rowhouses along Rosedale Street, looking Northwest

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Baltimore City, MD

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January 2004

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Rowhouses at the corner of Edmondson Avenue and N. Hilton St.,
looking west

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View of rowhouses along the north side of Edmondson Avenue west of
N. Hilton Street, looking North

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Rowhouses at the corner of N. Hilton Street and Harlem Avenue,
looking Southwest

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Alley behind N. Hilton Street, showing original concrete block garages,
looking South

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View of rowhouses on the north end of N. Hilton Avenue above
Harlem Street, looking west

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Houses along the west side of Denison Street, looking Southwest

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Corner of Denison and Harlem, showing area of demolished buildings,
looking West

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Detail of rowhouses along Rosedale Street, looking East

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St. Bernadine's Roman Catholic Church at the corner of Mt. Holly Street
and Edmondson Avenue, looking Northwest

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MJHP No. B-1378

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Example of rowhouses north of Gelston Drive (outside of historic district)
showing stylistic differences outside of study area, looking North

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